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RANDY KEHLER: HAVERFORD, AUGUST 1969

"Conscientious objection must be reserved for only the great moral issues, and Vietnam is not of this magnitude."

Henry A. Kissinger, August 12, 1969¹

In the last week of August 1969, I came to the campus of Haverford, a Quaker college near Philadelphia, to attend the triennial conference of the War Resisters' International (WRI).

The theme of the meeting--not unlike that of the Princeton conference on "America in a Revolutionary World," in April 1968--was "Liberation and Revolution." But this gathering had no Ivy League co-sponsor; and I was no longer coming as a committed counterrevolutionary.

Neither was I, on the other hand, a Gandhian nonviolent revolutionary, or a pacifist, as many of the other participants thought of themselves. But after a year of reading along lines Janaki had suggested, I had reached a point where I wanted to meet people who did see themselves that way.

So far Janaki was the only such person I had really come to know, or even met more than briefly. Since Princeton, she had visited me in Malibu, and we had spent a few days together in London. She had made a profound impression on me; I could say that she was, among other things, a hero of mine, like one I had only read about, Rosa Parks.

Fifteen years earlier one of my heroes was John Wayne (!), who had helped recruit me--and a lot of others--into the Marine Corps in The Sands of Iwo Jima. Something had happened to me, I noticed about this time; my heroes had changed color and sex.

But I wanted to meet others on this path--preferably, some whose experience was closer to my own--who were living daily, the Gandhian principles that I had been reading about. I must have been ready to be challenged and even changed by them.

More than the reading had made me ready for this. The time since Princeton had been another intensely frustrating year and

¹ "Strategist in the White House Basement," by Gerald Astor, in Look, August 12, 1969, p. 53.

more of living in a country that did not seem to be able to free itself from engagement in a destructive, hopeless war.

Many things had happened during those sixteen months that should have made a difference, and had not. A Presidential election campaign that had begun with the war as the central issue; a complete change of party and Administration; at the onset of the new Administration, a thorough reexamination of alternatives which I myself had designed; the opening of negotiations with Hanoi: not one of these, and no other aspect of normal politics, seemed to have brought extrication any closer, despite an electorate that expected it and was obviously anxious for it.

If I was ready to change my own relation to the situation--ready, even, to change my life--there was reason for it.

How much of this was conscious to me at the time and how much is hindsight, I'm not sure. Certainly I didn't foresee what did happen to me near the close of the conference; at the same time, I didn't just happen to be there.

I saw little of Janaki, who had invited me; she was too busy as one of the organizers of the meeting. But I did begin to meet, as I had hoped, the sort of activists who had shared a lunchtable with us at Princeton the day I met her.

In fact, all of those same people were here. One of them, Bob Eaton, who had sailed to North and South Vietnam on the Phoenix, was scheduled to be sentenced to prison on the third morning of the conference, in the Federal Courtroom in the Post Office Building in downtown Philadelphia. He expected a three-year sentence.

Eaton was the only draft resister I had ever met. That was probably one more than any of my associates in Washington or Santa Monica had ever encountered. Looking back, it is striking how isolated we were, as late as 1969 and even after many of us had become deeply critical of the war, from the active antiwar movement or the broader and older "peace movement."

My knowledge of such people still came almost exclusively from media accounts, overwhelmingly negative, in which they were presented as being, in varying degree, extremist, simplistic, pro-Communist or pro-NLF, fanatic, anti-American, dogmatic. In coming years, I would hear all those words applied to me; but they were not traits I wanted to be associated with, in '69 or later.

It was hard to imagine learning from, working with, being inspired by the sort of people depicted in the media in these terms. But no such problems arose with the real people I was now meeting and hearing. The four days of intense, articulate discussion I encountered, including much controversy over

principles and broad strategies as well as tactics, refuted each one of the stereotypes above.

To mention just one: the anarchist-pacifist critique of state power and violence that nearly all of the participants shared, provided little basis for an admiring or uncritical view of the Soviet Union, the Hanoi regime or the NLF.

A number of those present, including Michael Randle, Chairman of WRI, Devi Prasad, WRI General Secretary, and Bob Eaton, had taken nonviolent direct action to Eastern Europe in September 1968, leafletting a number of capitals in protest against the Soviet and Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia.

In the last session, Alfred Hassler, executive head of the pacifist International Fellowship of Reconciliation as well as its American branch, quoted Thich Nhat Hanh's description of Vietnam's plight: "The Americans say they are saving us from Communism; the NLF say they are saving us from American imperialism; and in the process our people and country are being destroyed. What we need most is to be saved from salvation."

I did arrive with misgivings about the dogmatic commitment to absolute pacifism I presumed they shared. The War Resisters' International, of which the War Resisters League (WRL) was the American branch, had begun after World War I as an association of conscientious objectors, at a time when few countries formally recognized that status. In the Twenties it had adopted a Gandhian perspective and now furthered a broad range of nonviolent liberation struggles, but it had kept its pacifist premises.

I told Randall Kehler, head of the San Francisco WRL branch and one of the conference organizers, that I felt I couldn't join WRL because, as I understood it, that involved signing a pledge to refuse participation in all wars, all of which were regarded as crimes against humanity.

Despite Vietnam and a strong and increasing tendency to look skeptically at the claims of any particular war to be "just," I told Kehler, I still felt (as I do today) that organized self-defense was justified against aggression: like Hitler's, or for that matter, like ours in Vietnam (or more recently, the Soviets in Afghanistan).

Kehler told me he shared similar reservations. "I've never signed that pledge," he said; he asked others standing around us, and found that most of them hadn't either. Which didn't mean that they endorsed either Allied actions in World War II or the tactics of the NLF. It meant that their pacifism was non-dogmatic: evolving and exploring, with a considerable recognition of uncertainties and dilemmas.

This was particularly evident in an intense discussion on the second day focussing on the question: what are nonviolent militants to do when a revolutionary movement they are participating in turns to violence? The leader of the discussion, Jean Van Lierde of Belgium, had faced this anguishing question repeatedly in his own revolutionary commitments, in the Congo, in Algeria and Tunisia.

He had his own strong views--which evoked very strong, contrary responses--but he prefaced his own summary statement with the admission: "For me, these past ten years in Africa have been a time of bewilderment and of feeling torn apart in two different directions."

Martin Luther King would have approved of the discussion that day. In Stride Toward Freedom he described his own efforts -- struggling with the challenge of Niebuhr's critique of pacifism-- to arrive at "a realistic pacifism. In other words, I came to see the pacifist position not as sinless but as the lesser evil in the circumstances. I felt then, and I feel now, that the pacifist would have a greater appeal if he did not claim to be free from the moral dilemmas that the Christian nonpacifist confronts." (p. 81, N. Y. paperback 1958).

A striking aspect of the conference, especially in retrospect, was that the Vietnam War was by no means in the forefront of attention, either on the agenda or in the discussions. This despite the facts that virtually everyone present, from the US or elsewhere, was a committed and active opponent of the war; and that, although talks in Paris were now proceeding, so was the war, and, except in North Vietnam, just as violently as before.

The transcript of the conference shows that only one of the ten background papers and one of the twenty speakers focussed directly on the war. The speaker, Vo Van Ai, secretary of the Overseas Vietnamese Buddhist Association, introduced his comments on Buddhist struggle in Vietnam with a reference to "the reality of violence in Vietnam, in Biafra, in the Middle east, in Czechoslovakia, etc...." (Other papers and speakers addressed, among other places, Northern Ireland, Israel, South Africa, Yugoslavia, India, NATO and Warsaw Pacts, and Latin America).

Vo Van Ai described the tasks of social nonviolent movements in Vietnam "should peace be established in the near future." He expressed the caution, "Of course, it is dangerous to speak of the post-war problem, because we give people the impression that the war is over, while in fact peasants continue to be killed in South Vietnam. However, it is wise to begin now to prepare...."

The paper, by the British analyst and peaceworker Peggy Duff, revealed acutely the gulf in negotiating positions of the two

sides--in particular, between Nixon's proposal for mutual withdrawal of US and North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam, and Hanoi's demand for unilateral withdrawal of non-Vietnamese forces (US and Korean)--but it clearly expressed the belief that US disengagement was inexorably underway, in effect pulling Nixon toward tacit acceptance of Hanoi's position.

"What will be even more interesting, once the war ends, maybe in a year, maybe 18 months, maybe two years (the process may, unfortunately be all too slow) will be to see the development of the two Vietnams side by side."

In what she undoubtedly regarded as her very restrained optimism Peggy Duff expressed an assumption [discussed at length in the preceding paper] shared not only by the community of antiwar activists but by virtually all segments of American society over the 16 months since Hanoi had accepted Johnson's proposal for open negotiations on April 3, 1968 (the third day, as it happened, of the Princeton conference).

That assumption was that the Tet Offensive and Johnson's offer had permanently settled, in the affirmative, the issue of whether the US would ever withdraw from Vietnam and end the war--accepting US failure to determine the politics of South Vietnam, failure to preclude Communist predominance in Saigon and elsewhere--the only question remaining being what Duff described as "the tempo of withdrawal...in this fag end of a long and beastly war."

But the assumption was wrong. I had just learned, in Washington the week before the conference, a closely-guarded secret: that President Nixon himself did not accept that assumption and was determined not to accept such a failure. It was as true now as it had been true over a year earlier: the war was not over and it was not in the process of ending. In some respects, it was almost sure to get larger.

I could not reveal at the conference what I knew. It had been revealed to me on an unusually confidential basis; there was little I could say about it without seriously compromising my sources, John Paul Vann and Morton Halperin, who were themselves not supposed to be privy to the information and had learned it confidentially. In any case, I was still trying to sort out its implications.

This is not the place to discuss this turn of events in detail. Briefly, Vann had learned from a high-ranking friend in the Army Chief of Staff's office that the scheduled pace of reduction of US forces in Vietnam was to be extremely slow--just enough, hopefully, to pacify domestic protest--so that the bulk of US forces would remain in Vietnam for years unless Hanoi capitulated.

Halperin had learned from associates on Kissinger's staff that direct warnings had been given to the Soviet Union in May that Nixon would escalate the war if his demand for mutual withdrawal--leaving the Thieu regime in power in Saigon--was not met. To demonstrate his willingness to carry out such threats, Nixon had actually already escalated the war, in secret from the American public: he had been secretly bombing Cambodia with B-52s since March of 1969.

By August 1969 I was convinced, as was Halperin, that mutual withdrawal was not acceptable to Hanoi; and both of us recognized, as apparently Nixon and Kissinger did not, that neither Hanoi nor the NLF in South Vietnam would yield to threats--or for that matter, to renewed or increased bombing--to give up their long struggle to share, at least, political power in Saigon.

I expected, on the basis of my study of past US decision-making, that the President, once having made threats to his Communist adversaries, would feel strongly compelled to carry them out. That meant that the war would not only be prolonged indefinitely but would eventually escalate: a prospect, again unknown to the American public, very similar to that in the fall of 1964.

Ironically, it seemed likely that Nixon himself did not share this expectation, since apparently he expected, against all experience, that his threats would succeed, perhaps even by the end of the year. In this respect, too, history was repeating.

Even the threats were familiar. Nixon and Kissinger, Halperin reported, had shown an almost obsessive interest in the notion of mining Haiphong Harbor, if pressure on the North and on the Soviet Union proved necessary. "This Administration," Halperin had predicted flatly in Washington, "will not go into the election of 1972 without having mined Haiphong and bombed Hanoi."

That line was in my head as I came to Haverford. But I had put aside for the four days of the conference addressing the specifics of what I ought to try to do about it. I was expecting to see Halperin again on the weekend after the meeting, before I went back to Santa Monica.

On Tuesday evening, I finally had a chance to talk with Bob Eaton, the night before he was to go into prison for three years.

It had been three years earlier--two years before I met him at Princeton, though I hadn't learned it then--that he had told his draft board that he would no longer cooperate with the selective service system. Since then, in addition to his voyage on the Phoenix to North and South Vietnam, he had worked on AQAG--A Quaker Action Group--and the Resistance, supporting non-cooperation with the draft. In September 1968 he had been one of

the members of WRI who had risked imprisonment in East Europe, conducting protests in several capital cities against the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

When Federal authorities came to arrest him for his draft resistance at a Quaker meeting and coffee house in Philadelphia where he had publicly taken sanctuary in the spring of 1969, they had to break the chains that bound him to many supporters. Many of these were arrested, together with others who placed their bodies in front of the police car taking him away.

A troublemaker. Yet given the prevailing belief, at the conference and in the country, that the war was in the process of ending, his impending prison sentence probably seemed to many almost an anachronism. (I had just learned, of course, that it was not).

He had alluded to this in his talk on the first day, which addressed resistance to militarism in the large rather than to the Vietnam war because, as he said: "The basis of GI organizing now is, no one wants to be the last guy shot in a war...That's also a problem for the Resistance, because I think no guy wants to be the last guy to go into prison resisting a particular war."

He seemed unnaturally calm about the thought that he might be doing just that. The day before his sentencing, Tuesday, August 26 he had attended all the sessions, including one that had gone on till 10:30 that evening, till it gave way to a beer party and dance. I found him in a side room away from the party, talking--with a beer in his hand, but talking--long-range strategy, tactics for transforming America.

It seemed odd to see him there that particular evening--somewhat like running into a bridegroom hanging out on the evening of the big day--but I was glad to have a chance to talk with him. After a while I began to feel uneasy about his being there with me; it seemed to me that he ought to be somewhere else, with someone else, or at least next door with the beer, wine, women and dancing.

Finally I hinted, "If you don't mind my saying so, I don't think I would be spending my last night before I went to prison just this way."

He said offhandedly, "Oh, this is what I do. I'm an organizer. I'll organize in prison, same as on the outside."

The conference was holding no meetings the next morning, Wednesday, so that members could go into Philadelphia to circle the Post Office Building in a vigil while Eaton was being sentenced in the federal courtroom inside. Buses and cars had been arranged to take us all in.

So, on an August morning in 1969, while Martin Niemoller, Vo Van Ai and Devi Prasad were inside with Bob Eaton, giving statements to the court on his behalf, I found myself in a line of variously-dressed peaceniks on a sidewalk in downtown Philadelphia, some of them carrying placards, others handing out leaflets.

Though I don't recall having misgivings before taking part in this group action, it seems to me that I must have had some. I had never done anything just like this before. The thought must have occurred to me: What if the press, or the police or the FBI, take pictures of us? What if my name is mentioned in the media, and gets back to Washington or Santa Monica?

It does not seem plausible that I felt specifically attracted to this opportunity for announcing to Rand, the Pentagon and the White House that I was joining the public opposition to the war: to their war: to them. It's hard to believe that I would have chosen this particular way to do that--or Philadelphia as the place--with these particular people, if I had not happened to be among them on the day Bob Eaton was going to prison.

The sidewalk outside the Federal Post Office in Philadelphia that morning was a long way away from the Executive Office Building in Washington (where the National Security Council staff had its offices, in which I had spent February that year summarizing the answers to "my" National Security Study Memorandum No. 1.)

Both were places, perhaps, for "speaking truth to power," which was the Quaker phrase for vigils and acts of "witness to peace" of the kind we were engaged in that morning. But you could not do it both places; not and be welcomed back to the NSC.

You could not have the opportunity to draft Top Secret commentaries for the President on Vietnam options, or to give his National Security Assistant confidential advice, if you were the sort of person who spent days' off from work demonstrating in support of draft resisters on streetcorners in Philadelphia.

That was only an extreme, special case of a broader principle. You could not have the confidence of powerful men and be trusted with their confidences, if there were any prospect that you would challenge their policies in public, in any forum at all (let alone, speak any of their secret truths to others).

That was the unbreakable rule of the Executive branch. It was the sacred code of the Insider, both the men of power and those, like myself, privileged to advise and help them. I knew that, as well as anyone. I had lived by that code for the last decade, it was in my skin. I was, it seems, in the process of shedding that skin that morning. Before I had grown a new one.

I felt naked. That is what I do remember of my first hour standing in that vigil. Not only naked, but raw. My actual memory is of feeling chilled, on a gray wintry day; I have to remind myself that it was Philadelphia in August.

There was no press, no police. People passed by incuriously, mostly without pausing to read our placards. Some accepted the leaflets that were handed to them, some didn't, or handed them back. Passers-by looked briefly at us, or kept their eyes straight ahead, as they would glance, or not, at panhandlers, or--nowadays--the homeless, or at a Salvation Army presence: which is how they may have seen us, or at least, how I remember feeling in their eyes, that first hour.

As a form of political communication, this seemed one step below a soap-box in Hyde Park. Without even saying very much, it was making a spectacle of yourself, making a public nuisance, in front of people who didn't count for much themselves and felt free to ignore you.

If you were going to confront the state--and your own professional associates--with a public stand, it seemed hard to imagine a lower-status or less effective way to do it. The thoughts, Why are we doing this? What am I doing here? seemed, at first, as visible on my forehead as the signboards my neighbors were carrying. I felt ridiculous.

That passed. After all, no one was paying much attention at all, one way or the other. My companions all seemed at ease; they had probably all done this before. I wanted to be useful; I took a bunch of leaflets and began offering them to the people walking by.

There seemed to be some technique to getting them to accept one; I experimented with different expressions, all pleasant, and various verbal formulas. I began to get into it. Before the morning was over, I was offering leaflets, with some success, to cars stopped momentarily in the adjacent intersections. My mood had changed. I was feeling unaccountably lighthearted.

Around noon, the word was passed that Eaton had been sentenced and had been taken off to a cell. The judge had listened respectfully to the statements by Niemoller and the others, and had then given Bob the three-year sentence he had expected. We went back to the conference.

Something very important had happened for me. I felt liberated. I doubt if I could have explained that at the time, but by now I have seen this exhilaration often enough in other people who have just gone through their first action of civil disobedience, whether or not they have been taken to jail.

As effectively as an act of civil disobedience, this simple vigil, my first public action, had freed me from a nearly universal fear: whose inhibiting force, I now think, is very widely underestimated. I had become free of the fear of appearing absurd, of looking foolish, for stepping out of line.

One other thing had happened; again I didn't fully recognize it till later. By stepping into that particular vigil line, in solidarity with Bob Eaton and in company with these others whose views I shared and whose lives of commitment I respected, I had stepped forward across another line, an invisible one of the kind that recruiters mark out on the floor of an induction center. I had joined a movement.

The next day, August 28, 1969, was the final day of the conference. The last session, in the afternoon, was a plenary on the subject, "Beyond All Separatism" featuring talks by Alfred Hassler, Martin Niemoller, Randy Kehler and Janaki.

The first two both addressed the linkage between world population growth and hunger, on the one hand, and the prospects of war, militarism, and ecological collapse on the other. (Hassler's talk, which seems especially timely still, must have been the first time I had heard the word ecology, and the problems associated with it). Both emphasized the need for collaborative efforts and solutions that crossed national and regional boundaries, reflecting, in effect, a new sense of personal and group identity as members of a global family.

Janaki had given me, before the session, a copy of her notes for her talk, which would be last. She was going to speak at some odds from the others, on some positive aspects of a sense of separateness, in revolutionary movements and ethnic cultures. However, she ended on the same note as the others, in lines that stayed with me over the years:

"But the well-springs of human conduct are not solely from such separateness. I remember Vinoba [Bhave] saying that the highest womanhood is where a woman can pick up any child and regard it exactly as though it were her own.

"There are certainly brilliant moments when this happens. It has to do with some spontaneous upsurge, a suffusion of non-distinctions, some universal feeling. They tell me that such moments expand, happen oftener until nothing else remains.

"If such an understanding can be the deepest layer, part of my mythology is that it must change our institutions, our intellects, despite their demands of finite graspings. Such demands can be prodded on, I feel, to come up with better solutions under the insistence of this other vision."

Reading the transcript now, I find that the talks by Hassler and Niemoller were also eloquent, even profound. Yet oddly, I have no memory of having heard them at all; perhaps because, like all the other talks at the conference except Randy's, they were impersonal.

Randy Kehler had been added to the panel at the last moment, having been shifted from another session, so he abandoned a talk he had written for the latter, on "Resistance to Militarism on the West Coast," and spoke in a personal vein, without notes. He said he wanted to share some of the things he had been feeling at the conference:

"Had I been trying to say something of this sort several years ago it would have been very different. I went to a very traditional New England preparatory school, followed by Harvard College, no less traditional, and as a result, when I finally hit the peace movement, I had a lot to unlearn. And I find myself talking more and more out of feelings, less out of theory, perhaps more from my gut than from my head, perhaps largely due to the tutelage of my wife, Jane."

I hadn't had a chance to talk with Kehler at any length earlier, because, like Janaki, he was too busy as a major organizer of the conference. I had noticed him in half-a-dozen urgent discussions, making administrative decisions, very well: he listened carefully, responded thoughtfully and with good sense. Of the many younger American activists I had met at the conference, he was the one I most wanted to see more of; I had decided to arrange to visit him in San Francisco soon.

He had a very simple and direct manner, along with warmth and humor, a very appealing person. He happened in addition to be arrestingly handsome, with a hawk's-wing of dark hair over a face that somehow reminded me of a native American's, but with intense blue eyes and fair skin. He and his wife seemed to be very close partners.

I was somewhat surprised, as he began, to hear that we had gone to the same college: that he was, like me, a transplant from Cambridge to California. I remember thinking, "Well, a credit to Harvard! And one who learned better after he left." I then heard for the first time--later I heard it in more detail--the path that had led him to to leave graduate school to join the War Resisters' League office in San Francisco, which he now headed.

"Id like to say something very briefly about how I joined the peace community, which I prefer to call it, rather than the peace movement. When I finished Harvard College and three weeks of Stanford College, I was out on the West Coast. I was involved in a demonstration [at the Oakland Induction Center] in which hundreds of men and women were sitting in the doorways of the induction

center trying to pose a question to all those going through the doors, to be inducted or to take their physicals. We wanted that question to be very real, and not just a matter of words, so we actually placed our bodies in those doorways.

"Well, that was a very new experience for me and one which really changed the whole course of my life. Before I knew it I was behind bars with that same couple of hundred people and I found a community of people for the first time that not only...were committed to each other, but a community of people that was committed to something larger than themselves, something probably more noble, more ideal, than anything I had been involved in after 22 years of public education.

..."I'd like to talk for a minute about two worlds which I see as I look outside of myself. I think both worlds are very much present now. However I think one world is waning and one is emerging. And the waning world I see is the world that's dominated primarily by fear.

"It's that fear, not only of our total annihilation but our fear of each other, that's led to the kind of separatism, competition, rivalry, greed and envy which we see all around us.

..."The other world I see is an emerging world, one that is present now and is growing. I think that's a world where for one reason or another--perhaps because the old world indeed has gone too far now, because we are threatened by annihilation--people are no longer afraid of each other, they are no longer even afraid of death, of being destroyed.

"It's a world, as several of our speakers already during this week have indicated, becoming more and more like a family. It's a world which is beginning to question and even to destroy economic systems that depend on one man's pitting himself against another, on social systems which depend on one man's comparing himself with another, depend on nation states which pit large groups of people against each other.

..."And I guess that indicates that I have some kind of a hope, or faith or something. And it's true, I really do...It's like a feeling or a spirit that's inside of all of us, young and old, which is beyond words, beyond description, beyond analysis, but we know it's there and I think it's the most powerful thing there is.

..."Which is really what my old friend Ira Sandperl who couldn't be here, always reminds me. Some of you may know Ira. [Sandperl was, among other things, Joan Baez' mentor on the principles and practice of nonviolence; she founded the Center for the Study of Nonviolence in Palo Alto in large part for his teaching work].

"I call Ira up on the phone all the time, usually when I get depressed, and I say, 'Ira, they've just taken away my best friend to jail,' or, 'Ira, did you read in the paper today what the United States has done this time in Vietnam,' or 'Ira, did you hear about the demonstration in which the demonstrators this, that or the other thing.'

"And he always chuckles and he says--and for those of you who don't know him, he's a generation older than I am--'Yeah, yeh, I know pal, but we're going to change all that.'

"I don't know, when I talk about hope I have a feeling that maybe some of you think that I'm just trying to sound hopeful or that maybe I'm naive or I don't even believe it myself. But that's not true, I really do have hope and Ira's really right.

"I'd like to also say something about nonviolence. It seems to me that nonviolence is really the same thing as love, and we all know that love doesn't exist in a vacuum, in fact it only exists when it's exercised...

"I also think that nonviolence, like love, is really infinite, which means that unfortunately we can't give up. It would be very nice if we had a closed set of principles or theories or tactics or strategies and we could exhaust them, and when we got finished we could say that we tried, but they didn't work. But unfortunately, we're talking about something which isn't quite so simple.

... "Because to give up on nonviolence, I really believe, is to give up on ourselves; and I don't know about you but I can't give up on myself. It's not just a strategy for me, but it's really the only way that I know to live."

Randy's talk, along with the sound of his voice, reflective and earnest, comes back to me in full as I reread it. Listening to him, I recall, was like looking into clear water. And what I remember vividly--with no need of the report to remind me--is not so much the content of what he had said up to this point but the impression he was making on me, as he spoke without preparation from the platform.

It so happens that it is hard to imagine anyone whose looks, manner and virtues were more American than Randy Kehler's. And as I was looking at him, I was experiencing a feeling that that had not been so familiar lately, a sense of national pride. I was proud that he was American, and that the participants from other continents were having a chance to see him. I thought to myself, "He's the best we have."

As I was thinking this, Randy brought me out of my reverie by saying something with a catch in his voice. He had just said, "Yesterday our friend Bob went to jail."

He had to pause for a moment. He cleared his throat; evidently he had tears in his eyes. He smiled and said, "This is getting to be like a wedding we had a month ago, when Jane and I were married on the beach in San Francisco, because I always cry a lot."

After a moment he went on, in a steady voice. "Last month David Harris went to jail. Our friends Warren and John and Terry and many others are already in jail, and I'm really not as sad about that as it may seem. There's something really beautiful about it and I'm very excited that I'll be invited to join them very soon."

Again he had to pause. A hesitant scattering of applause began--the audience seemed taken by surprise--which suddenly swelled, and people began to stand up. But he was going on, and people stopped applauding, continuing to rise.

"Right now I'm the only man left in the San Francisco WRL office, because all the others have gone to prison already, and soon, when I go, it will be all women in the office. And that will be all right.

"Last night Igal [Roodenko, Chairman of WRL, in prison as a CO in World War II] was trying to explain to someone here at the conference that he didn't need to be afraid of jail, and he used words which were really helpful to me.

"I'm not someone who talks about God very much, in fact I'm not sure I even believe in anything I could call God, but what Igal said was, 'You have nothing to worry about, because you know that God will take care of you.'

"I think I know that, and I think Bob and David know that, but there's one other reason why I guess I can look forward to jail, without any remorse or fear, and that's because I know that everyone here and lots of people around the world like you will carry on."

The whole audience was standing. They applauded and cheered for a long time. I stood up for a moment with the rest, but I fell back into my seat, breathing hard, dizzy, swaying. I was crying--a lot of people must have been crying--but then I began to sob silently, grimacing under the tears, shoulders shaking.

Janaki was to talk next, but I couldn't stay. I got up--I was sitting in the very last row in the amphitheatre--and made my

way down the back corridor, till I came to a men's room door. I went inside and turned on the light.

It was a small room, with two sinks. I staggered over to the wall and slid down to the tile floor. I began to sob convulsively, uncontrollably. I wasn't silent any more. My sobbing sounded like laughing; at other times I moaned. Inadvertently, my lips were pulled back to their limit, baring my teeth in a wild grin. My chest was heaving. I had to gasp for breath.

No one came in over the next hour and a half. I sat there alone for over an hour without getting up, my head sometimes tilted back against the wall, sometimes in my hands, without stopping to shake from my sobbing.

A line kept repeating itself in my head: We are eating our young.

I had not been ready to hear what Randy had said. I had not been braced for it. With all that had happened at the conference, all that had been said--even Bob Eaton's being sentenced and being taken off--nothing had warned me that this was coming.

I don't think the others knew either. I don't think he had mentioned to anyone that his own sentencing was coming up in early December, or I would have heard something of it. I don't know how many at the conference even knew what I learned in detail only later: that he that he had told a draft board in Arizona years before--like Bob Eaton--that he would no longer cooperate with the system; and that he had finally been tried and convicted, just this summer, of deliberately failing to notify the board of his change of address to San Francisco.

In the midst of my reverie about Randy as our national representative, as young Mr. America, seeing him with almost a parent's pride though I was more the age of an elder brother, it had taken me several moments to grasp what he had just said.

Then it was as though an ax had split my head; and my heart broke open. But what had really happened was that my life had split in two.

We are eating our young, I thought, sitting on the floor of the men's room in the second part of my life. On both sides of the barricades: cannon-fodder, prison-fodder. We are using them, using them up, "wasting" them. This, this is what my country has come to. The best thing that the best young men of our country can do with their lives is to go to prison.

My son, Robert, was 13. This war, or another one like it, would be going on when he was 18. My son was born for prison.

Another line kept repeating in my head, a refrain from a song by Leonard Cohen: "So it's come to this...it's come to this. And wasn't it a long way down? And wasn't it a hard way down?"

After about an hour I stopped sobbing. I stared blankly at the sinks across from me, thinking, not crying, exhausted; breathing deeply. Finally I got up and washed my face. I gripped the sink and stared at the mirror. Then I sat down on the floor again to think some more. I cried again, a couple of times more, briefly: not so violently.

What could I do, what should I be doing, to help end the war, now that I was ready to go to prison if necessary?

No transition period occurred, during which I questioned whether I was willing to go to prison to help end the war. That didn't come up as a question; it would have answered itself. I knew myself from Vietnam.

I had risked my life--or worse, my legs, my body--a thousand times driving the roads there, or in days of combat. If I could do that when I believed in the war--and sometimes even when I didn't--it seemed to follow self-evidently, once the issue was raised, that I was capable of going to prison to help end it.

Might some action that risked prison help shorten the war? Evidently Randy thought so. That came close to being a good enough answer. Besides, I could have little doubt, from my own experience of the moment, that he was right. I had just felt the power of his action on my own heart.

What I had just heard from Randy Kehler had put the question in my mind, as nothing else ever had: What could I do to help shorten the war if I were ready to go to prison for it?

In the days that followed, one thing in particular came to mind, which might help avert the new escalation of which I had just been warned. I had in my possession, back in my office safe at Rand, a 7000-page classified study which documented 23 years of lies, crimes, and secret plans for escalation exactly on the pattern of what the Nixon Administration was planning to threaten once again.

It would be better if I had current documents proving what I had been told about Nixon's current threats and plans. If I did, then in this second life I would certainly do what I had failed to do when I had comparable documents in my possession in 1964, at the time of the Tonkin Gulf raids and Resolution: give them to Congress or the public, as proof of Administration lies, in order to mobilize resistance to the secretly impending expansion of the war.

Lacking such documents now, I could try to make do with documented secret history. I could make public the secret McNamara Study, to back up my warning that what had happened before was about to happen again.

Releasing the Top Secret study might, just might, forestall the secretly prepared and threatened escalation this time. It would mean, I had no doubt, my going to prison for the rest of my life.